

PM remarks on the fundamental reform of the British state: 13 March 2025

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's remarks on the fundamental reform of the British state.

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It's really fantastic to be here and to see you. And to celebrate what you're doing. This must be an incredibly exciting place to work.

Because as Angela said, I went and saw the first bottle of Dettol that you have just in the room around the corner, I think it was 1833 that that bottle was made.

And for sepsis what a breakthrough that was.

And then so much that's happened in the intervening years.

And as we are here, we've got scientists in the labs, probably working on the next breakthrough that you will be involved in.

So it's really fantastic to come here to talk to you.

I've just got a few words to say about the way I see the government playing its part in taking our country forward, and then we've got some questions from you.

Let me start with the pledge that we put before you and everybody in the country at the election.

Because it was a really simple pledge, it was on every leaflet, on every advert, on every speech we all gave.

That word and pledge was Change. Change.

And that wasn't just about an offer to British people.

It was actually a statement about the world we now live in.

Change.

Because we're in a changing world.

You can feel it everyday, great forces buffeting and impacting on the lives of working people.

Particularly at the moment globally, where there's an instability, I think that we can feel that's hasn't been there for years.

Developing before our very eyes, in relation to the impact it has on the insecurity of working people across the country.

And that's why everything we're doing in relation to Ukraine is so important.

And you've seen the developments in the recent weeks, this week, going on even today.

Because I profoundly believe that if we don't secure a just peace and a lasting peace, then that insecurity that we've already felt will continue.

And that means here, higher prices, higher bills and the cost of living crisis going on for even longer – like a chokehold on our future which will be much much harder for us to tackle.

We know some basics, Putin's appetite for conflict and for chaos is already there and it will only grow.

And Russia is already menacing our skies, our waters, our streets, and our national security.

That's why I believe that the fundamental task of politics right now is to you take tough decisions on security.
And that's why we raised our defence spending.
Which we also need to use as opportunity to renew our communities.
Because more now than ever, national security is economic security.
And strength abroad, and we definitely need that more than ever at the moment, but that demands security back at home.
Because look, you're not strong if your energy security is exploited by Putin...
You're not strong if 1 in 8 young people are not in education or work...
And you're not strong if you lose control of your public finances...
And you can't build your industries.
So that is the test of our times.
The goal of my Plan for Change...
National security for national renewal.
And look – we are making a start, we're already delivering on this, securing the future through our Plan for Change...
On the priorities that matter to you and to working people across the country.
So wages are now going up faster than prices...
We're clearing the asylum backlog at a record rate...
And NHS waiting lists are coming down.
Now when we started preparing for today I was going to say that NHS waiting lists were coming down four months.
I can tell you today, the statistics have just come out, that that is 5 months in a row...
And that's in winter, it's really hard to get waiting lists down in winter.
As you know the pressure on the NHS is much greater in winter.
Now that's 5 months of the NHS waiting lists coming down.
So that is the beginning of the delivery we need.
But given what has happened globally, given the insecurity in our country, now is the time in my belief for greater urgency and to go further and faster on security and renewal.
So every pound spent...
Every regulation...
Every decision...
Must deliver for working people.
And I don't just mean efficiency, although doing what you're doing you'll know how important efficiency is...
I mean something else, it's allowing the state to operate at max power...
Reforming it so it's closer to communities
Tearing down the walls in Westminster
Inviting the British people in as partners in business of change
To some extent you're already doing that in the work you're doing with the NHS – being partners in the change we need to do.
Having National missions that galvanise the entire country behind them
Business, unions, charities pulling together.
The pride that we all have in our country, harnessed – to rebuild Britain.
I believe in the power of government
I've always believed in the power of government.
I've seen it at its best..

I'll give you one example last year in the summer when we had those terrible riots, what we saw then in response was dynamic, it was strong and it was urgent. It's what I call active government, on the pitch doing what was needed. But for many of us the feeling is that we don't really have that everywhere, all of the time, at the moment.

At the moment the state employs more people than it has in decades
And yet – look around country
Do you see good value everywhere?
Because I don't.
I actually think it's weaker than it's ever been.
Overstretched...
Unfocussed...
Trying to do too much...
Doing it badly...
Unable to deliver the security that people need.
I believe that working people want active government – they don't want a weak state.
They want it to secure our future.
They want it to take the big decisions so can get on with their lives.
We don't want bigger state, or an intrusive state, an ever-expanding state.
A state that demands more and more from people as it fails to deliver on core purposes.
So we've got to change things.
Now the good news is technology can massively help.
If we push forward with digital reform of government – and we are going to do that, we can make massive savings, £45 billion savings in efficiency.
AI is a golden opportunity.
You will already be thinking about how you use it in your work.
That's an opportunity we are determined to seize
So we are going to get the best of best on AI working across government
I'm going to send teams into every government department with a clear mission from me to make the state more innovative and efficient
But we also need to go further and faster on regulation
I want to be really clear about this, it's not about questioning the dedication or the effort of civil servants...
It is about the system that we've got in place.
That system was created by politicians
The buck stops with us.
But that's just it...
Over a number of years
Politicians chose to hide behind a vast array of quangos, arms length bodies and regulators, you name it.
A sort of cottage industry of checkers and blockers
Using taxpayer money to stop the government delivering on taxpayer priorities
Now take our plan build 1.5 million homes.
That is to restore the dream of home ownership .
The opportunity and aspiration that home ownership gives people
I'd describe it as a base camp for life
1.5 million homes we've said we will build.
Now that is a controversial policy

There are people across the country who don't think we should do that
We always knew it was contentious
We knew that before the election.
That's why we put it front and centre in manifesto
Because we knew that needed a clear democratic mandate to do what we needed to do.
And we got that in the election.
And now we've put it in our Plan for Change.
Yet some parts of the state haven't got the memo.
I'll give you an example - there is an office conversion in Bingley Yorkshire.
That is an office conversion that will create 139 homes.
But now the future is uncertain.
Because regulator was not properly consulted on the power of cricket balls.
That's 139 homes.
Think of the people, the families that want those homes to make their life and now they're held up.
Why?
You'll decide if this is a good reason.
I quote:
'The ball strike assessment doesn't appear to have been undertaken by a specialist qualified consultant'
So that's what's holding up these 139 homes.
Right across Britain people are frustrated, they don't think politics works for them because it doesn't deliver on promises.
How can you justify that?
That parts of the state see their job as blocking the government
From doing the very things it was elected to do.
You can't justify it.
And it's a pattern.
Giving you another example - environment regulators stopping clean energy investment.
Think about that, clean energy, really good for the environment.
Struggling to get done because of environmental regulators.
It doesn't make sense.
'Jumping spiders' stopping an entire new town
I've not made that example up, it's where we've got to.
Infrastructure projects requiring planning documents longer than entire works
Shakespeare
We've created a watchdog state – completely out of whack with the priorities of the British people.
And it's unfit for the volatile and insecure world that we live in
And I don't think for one second what public servants want to do
If you walk around Whitehall...
I know recruiting some of best talent in country.
People who join civil service because they want to serve their country by delivering change
Yet somehow – we take that energy, that pride, that patriotism
And we misdirect it into blocking
Well that's got to end, no more.
We were elected to take on blockers and deliver change

And that is what we'll do
Well stop the legal challenges that stop building...
Cut statutory consultees who can veto government activity...
Hack back the thicket of red tape that stop us getting things done.
And look, there's no need to compromise on things like building standards.
And there's no good reason building and nature pitted against each other on every single site
We can have the best of both,
Less regulation...
More building...
And a massive scale up in nature with the new Nature Restoration Fund.
And if you think it's hard enough for the government and state, and it is and were frustrated and going to change it.
Imagine what it feels like for small businesses
Now I speak to small businesses a lot, and I spoke to a brewer
She's called Alison from Carlisle, she brews beer
She tells me it's 'proper beer' – I'll take her up on that and test it.
But I'm really struck by how difficult it makes it for the most enterprising people in country to just get on with the job
Trading standards advice which changes constantly.
Long forms on business rates
Not able get clear advice when trying to help
The example she gave was a boiler grant – and nobody could advise whether their business was eligible for it or not.
Turns out it wasn't
But she only found that out after hours and hours filling in paperwork
That is precious time and money - wasted
So that has just got to stop.
That's why today I am issuing new target for our government
We will make sure compliance costs for businesses are cut by a quarter...
Yes that's 25% compliance costs that are going to go – and they will.
That's less red tape
More delivery
Renewing our country with growth.
And look, some people are going to say good luck
We've heard all this before
And we've heard some of that this week
And to some extent they're right
[Political content redacted]
But that raises question
Why is this time different? What was that all about?
First – as ever, you can't discount the chaos that we had under the last government
[Political content redacted]
But I think there is something deeper about Westminster politics here
There is a knee jerk response to difficult questions, to difficult lobbies
The response goes like this, let's create an agency...
Start a consultation...
Make it statutory, have a review
Until slowly, almost by stealth
Democratic accountability is swept under a regulatory carpet

Politicians almost not trusting themselves, outsourcing everything to different bodies because things have happened along the way – to the point you can't get things done.

I accept that all parties have done a bit of this

[Political content redacted]

So today has to be a line in the sand for all of us

[Political content redacted]

It was early - and it was decisive

It sent a signal across Whitehall that was never undone

So today I'm going to reverse it

Because I don't see why...

Decision about £200 billion of taxpayer money

On something as fundamental to our security as the NHS

Should be taken by an arms-length body, NHS England.

And can't in all honesty explain to British people

Why we should spend their money

On two layers of bureaucracy.

That money could and should be spent on nurses, doctors, operation and GP appointments

So today – I can announce

We're going to cut bureaucracy across state

Focus government on the priorities of the working people

And shift money to the frontline

So I am bringing management of the NHS back into democratic control...

By abolishing the arms-length body - NHS England.

That will put the NHS back at the heart of government where it belongs

Freeing it – to focus on patients

Less bureaucracy...

With more money for nurses...

An NHS refocussed...

On cutting waiting times at your hospital

Now, tough choices won't just stop there

In this era, they will keep on coming

Our task is clear

National security

National renewal

Driving change forward with a Plan for Change

Focussed on the interests of working people

Securing our future, together.

Thank you for listening.